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Parents vital in early development

Though David Lawrence Jr. believes that the public and politicians have a lot to learn regarding the early childhood development movement, he's convinced that if adults become well educated regarding such opportunities, children will benefit down the line.

"We have all the research in the world

IF YOU GO

What: David Lawrence Jr., president of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, speaks on "Helping Every Child Read and Succeed"

When: 6 p.m. Thursday; reception at 5:30 p.m.

Where: Scottish Rite Center, 463 Paseo de Peralta

Cost: Free

to know that if we invested wisely up front in children's lives, we would make a stunning difference in the future," Lawrence said by phone from his office in Miami.

Lawrence, former publisher of *The Miami Herald* (he retired in

1999), is president of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation and a member of Florida's Children's Cabinet. He'll speak on "Helping Every Child Read and Succeed" at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Scottish Rite Center, 463 Paseo de Peralta. The free event, which is preceded by a 5:30 p.m. reception, is hosted by the New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership and United Way of Santa Fe County.



Robert Nott
Education Beat

Lawrence — who was bracing for Tropical Storm Nicole to hit when we spoke by phone — acknowledged that political leaders and the public school system bear much of the responsibility for the success of ECD programs.

Still, "The first responsibility belongs to parents. They're at the heart, the soul, the core of what needs to be done," he said.

Lawrence said most parents want to know how they can make a difference in

planning ECD opportunities for children. The basic foundation includes: high-quality child day care, ensuring children have access to good medical providers, and parent-building skills that teach mom and dad how to nurture, support, love, communicate, and instruct pre-school toddlers.

To do that, he stressed, communities must form movements — movements that are not aimed at "helping those children," he said, but "helping our children."

Still, those elements require funding, and in a state where an estimated 25.5 percent of children are living in families at or below the federal poverty level (according to one 2007 study), this sort of ECD support may be hard to come by, regardless of who is elected governor in November.

ECD supporters argue that children under 5 quickly develop the ability to learn basic social and academic skills that will pay dividends throughout their later educational years. Lawrence said parents can take advantage of everyday events and chores to teach.

"There's lots of things folks can do," he said. "Going shopping together, talking about shapes, sizes, cultures. And understand, television is not a good baby sitter for children. It's not interactive or stimulating in the way that real conversation is."

Play time is vital during these early years, he emphasized. "Children grow in many ways, physically and intellectually and also socially and emotionally. Much of your success in this world is how you build relationships with other people, so I'm not talking about drilling 3-year-olds with numbers and letters. Early literacy experiences that can help include play. You can learn an enormous amount through play."

Call the United Way at 505-216-2986 to make reservations to the event. If you're interested in more regional-based information on ECD, visit New Mexico Early Childhood Action Network Resource Site at earlychildhoodnm.com or New Mexico Voices for Children at nmvoices.org.

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